

A Quaint Spinster (1895)



Frances E. Russell



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A QUAIN SPINSTER.

BY

FRANCES E. RUSSELL.



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ROBERTS BROTHERS.

1895.

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TO

MY "BENEDICTION,"

WHOSE BEAUTIFUL LIFE HAS BEEN MY SOLACE,

JOY, AND INSPIRATION,

This Little Volume,

WITH A WEALTH OF HAPPY LOVE,

IS TENDERLY DEDICATED.

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A QUAIN'T SPINSTER.

CHAPTER I.

MISS PRISSIE.

She always reminded me of a comet, with her eccentric dashes and blazings, and utter independence of any defined orbit, but she has a warm heart.

W. D. G.

QUAIN'TNESS was the distinguishing characteristic, so to speak, of Miss Priscilla Trippings.

This was the prevailing sentiment in the minds of her large circle of acquaintances, select circle of friends, and limited circle of relatives. Nobody

said so to her, of course, so she went on being quaint.

What might have been the effect of such a word upon said characteristic it is not the purpose of this sketch to treat interrogatively. The fact remains, — glaring or its opposite, pleasing or otherwise, — Miss Prissie Trippings *was* quaint. This quaintness was most strikingly developed in *appearance*. What she wore did not in the least degree heighten or decrease the peculiarity. She once had a rich black silk made after the most fashionable mode, but when Miss Priscilla arrayed herself in its glossy folds, lo! it was immediately transformed into the quaintest of black silk dresses!

Miss Prissie invariably chose sober colors for dresses because, as she jerkily remarked to a hapless merchant who ventured to show the latest rainbow tints, "I pride myself upon never being in the least degree conspicuous, Sir." Dear soul! She meant what she said (it is a fact that she never did anything to make herself fall into a condition so distasteful to her high ideas), neither was there any fault in that eminently proper colored dress fabric; *yet* when Miss Prissie Trippings and said dress, of what material soever, met, there was generated on the spot that most unfortunate *bête noire* — conspicuousness. Miss Prissie did not know *what* had been gener-

ated; so, dear simple heart, she went on quite oblivious of anything unusual, and continued to delight herself in the bracing power of the atmosphere!

Perhaps the trouble lay in her bonnets, though, for that matter, hers were model bonnets always, — quite free from “fuss and feathers,” and becoming withal.

Once on Miss Prissie’s head, however, the bonnet would suddenly become possessed of Tower of Pisa proclivities, with its centre of gravity forever threatening to fall without the base.

This side-wise tendency played wild works with Miss Prissie in every way. No matter how securely she put up

her heavy brown hair (she often stuck in long hair pins till they pushed to the opposite side, giving quite an innocent, porcupine appearance to her large top-knot) it would be side-wise in half an hour.

The same was true of her collar. Let her give it a fair start in the morning, and it would have paid a visit to the back of her neck before Miss Prissie's next discouraged look in the mirror.

How many years had elapsed since this quaint spinster had been given the soundly old-fashioned and Puritanic name of Priscilla there is no means of knowing, for Miss Prissie never talked about herself, or other

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people. She was neither gray, nor wrinkled, neither pretty nor ugly, neither attractive nor repulsive; but she was not young, and she was quaint.


All things considered Miss Priscilla Trippings' gait was the quaintest thing about her. She neither walked meanderingly nor aimlessly; and yet — it was very ludicrous — when Miss Prissie lifted up her foot it was an open wonder on the part of beholders where it would come down and how. Consequently, if she was trying to pass a gentleman to the left she would invariably hit him with her *right* elbow; or if making a bee line for the middle of the sidewalk she'd be sure to stick her umbrella into the unoffending

shins of a small boy *behind* the lamp-post.

Now Miss Prissie was the most sympathetically offending person in the world, and she deplored the latitudinarian tendencies of her pedestrian appendages with secret, heart-felt grief. To the oft-harassed sufferers she was profuse in her apologies, and if she had possessed a small fortune there is no doubt that a large portion of it would have been spent in buying presents to atone in part for bruised shins and skinned elbows. She lay awake several hours one night debating the question as to whether she had better divide her box of vaseline with Tommy Brent's mother because

the lad would not keep out of the way of her unfortunate steppings and thumpings. The above may seem to be a statement of exaggerated, sentimental weakness on the part of Miss Prissie. Perhaps it was. However, she had the Golden Rule written on her heart, and, therefore, if she hit Tommy Brent for aught or naught it meant something to her as well as to him. Miss Prissie was quaint, very quaint indeed!

Not only in looks but in deeds (as has been already hinted) was this true of her. Her heart was continually doing those things which her judgment serenely opposed after the deeds were done, thus throwing Miss Prissie's mind



into wild confusion, in which said deeds stood forth like grim spectres for many days. The only way in which they could be effectually “downed” was for Miss Prissie to declare herself the slave of her judgment henceforth. 'Tis needless to remark that so wise a resolution was invariably broken within an hour.

It is a bad thing to have too much of a good thing. Miss Prissie had too much heart—entirely too much—for the “balance of power” amidst her several functions. The heart was biggest and ruled,—a regular Napoleon, making inroads in every direction, and doing the very thing least expected at any particular moment.

It bulldozed Miss Prissie until she was a veritable coward. She would follow her heart on all manner of harmless excursions which always ended in fits of embitterment and self-reproach.

It is hoped that no one will infer that Miss Prissie ever made excursions into masculine dominions. Oh, no! These heart expeditions were of quite a different character. In her broad love for *everybody* Miss Prissie's quaintness grew to have quite a catholic cast. Dear Miss Prissie!

She lost her powers of speech when she felt most deeply, and as she was feeling deeply all the time the consequence was that she said but little.

Her favorite mode of demonstration

was by gift-presenting. Where she got so much to give away was one of the inconceivable mysteries among her friends who knew the real state of her purse better than she did herself. Oh, that purse! It was in reality a Simple Simon's sieve, and held money about as long as the renowned vessel of Dame Goose's hero held water.

No present meant for Miss Prissie ever fulfilled its original destiny,— she either gave it away at once, or planned it away. Yet, she was n't inappreciative; the fact is that she was one of the most appreciative of persons, but she was *quaint*.

Christmas was a marvellous experience in Miss Prissie's heart history.

She would gather together all her treasures in the way of last year's gifts and survey them. She wasn't indifferent to the love which had prompted the givers, so she would drop some tender tears and proceed to business.

The friends with whom she boarded and the servants naturally claimed her first attentions. She would run out to the kitchen in a half trot with the handkerchiefs and mittens in hand, and lay them in helpless confusion on cook's lap, saying wildly: "Don't thank me, *please*. Not worth anything at all, nothing at all—not a cent. Very glad to do it—very."

Then she would fly back to the


house and, stealing into Miss Martha's room, deposit a gift for her on the bottom shelf of the bookcase where the half-blind old lady would not peep, perhaps, till Easter.

Then she would step into Miss Jane's room and *whisper* to her deaf friend that she had brought her this scent bag. The old lady, entirely misunderstanding, would construe the words to be: "Sent by Miss Bogg," and the latter, dimly mystified, would receive thanks instead of Miss Prissie.

However, her most humiliating defeats were with her relatives. She was always in a chronic state of gratitude to them and, consequently, was fired with a zeal to make returns.

They were well-meaning relatives and not in the least sentimental about the returns, but Miss Prissie was. She brought such heroic lenses to bear upon their deeds of kindness that she quite forgot that, proportionally, was she bringing the microscope to bear upon her own small gifts. However, Miss Prissie did not flinch. She laid her quaint presents all around — from the card with pink moss roses on it which she pushed under the door-sill of handsome Aubrey's room, to the empty cornucopia which she left sticking up in baby's tiny stocking, — and then she stole away like a culprit.

December twenty-sixth was the most awful day in all the year to Miss



Prissie, — a regular Waterloo day. Brigadier-General Judgment came too late to save from defeat, and thus only intensified the humiliation. She regretted everything. She was sorry she had ever had any Christmas gifts the year before; still sorrier that she had ever been so foolish as to give them away; and sorriest of all that she had given them to the unfortunate recipients. If she might only have the privilege of giving them *over again* all would be well. Not one present got to the proper person in the proper time or way. Poor Miss Prissie! She was both silly and quaint, — was n't she?

This wailing over the past fascina-

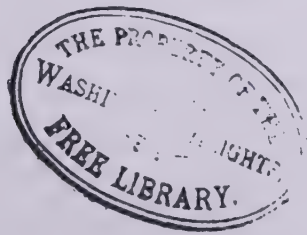
tion for gift-making, happily for the continuation of a healthy mental condition for Miss Prissie, ended with that night in a firm resolve that another year she would act differently.

The next Christmas she gave nothing in any direction and felt so mean and miserable that she determined to retract and retrace. Even when she decided to recommence giving in a normal way she accomplished it in so jerky a manner as to alarm friends, and provoke the laughter of Aubrey, — the Adonis of the family, — and the remainder of the rising generation.

“Priscilla is so quaint over her Christmas gifts that she really makes

me uncomfortable," was Mrs. Graham's remark to her daughter Camilla, after one of Miss Prissie's yule-tide visitations.

How very, very uncomfortable was the donor of said gifts Aubrey's mother never dreamed!




CHAPTER II.

WORK AND PASTIME.

When women have enough to do they are perfectly tractable.

CHARLOTTE YONGE.

MISS PRISSIE had lived for many years with the two sisters—Misses Martha and Jane Selwig—and had come to look upon the quaint home as her own. Really she would have seemed out of her element elsewhere. It was a low house of “ye olden tyme” in a quiet part of the great bustling city, and Miss Prissie liked it. There was n’t a modern thing in the house except, perhaps, the stock of




presents which Miss Martha and her sister had been guarding most carefully, for over a quarter of a century. Back of those years things in this house were as they had been in the good old days when Miss Martha's grandfather, Mr. Abraham Selwig, brought his bride within its walls. Everything was quaint,—from Miss Martha's cap, surmounted by a faded lilac bow, down to the beaded knitting sheath which held Miss Jane's otherwise refractory steel needle.

The mirrors, the pictures, the brasses, the ornaments,—all looked as if they had been dropped down from the year 1700. A place never fitted a person more perfectly than did this small


house of quiet quaintness fit Miss Prissie. She was restfully content in it when each day's work was over; for Miss Prissie had a daily work to do which had not a vestige of romance attached to it. She taught in a public school. She kept good order, her pupils improved, the Superintendent was pleased, the children were happy; and yet hers was n't like other school-rooms, and she was n't like other teachers. Without any power to express it the pupils *felt* her quaintness.

Yet there was n't one of her boys who would n't have fought in her service, or one of her girls who did not imitate her virtues and follow her advice.



In her moments of leisure Miss Prissie was fond of reading, and especially fond of ghost stories in which the ghost after many marvellous deeds seen and unseen was finally most disgracefully changed into a sheeted school-boy, or a cow, or rats, or the long-suffering guide-post!

Poor patient post! Miss Prissie often pitied it. However, she liked ghost stories — no matter what the outcome — through and through. She was fond of love stories too, and read them with more than school-girl avidity. Why should n't she? The woof of reality had gotten well woven in with the warp of romance in Miss Prissie's nature, and she was better able to



decide upon the merits of such stories than she was twenty-five or thirty years ago. She had passed beyond the pretty follies of loverdom, but she had brought away much wisdom and some romance.

Miss Prissie's heart history was wrapped up very carefully in a packet of faded yellow letters tied with blue ribbon. She was not at all ashamed of that packet in her trunk, but she never spoke of it because there was no reason why she should and every reason why she should n't. The deepest things are thought, not spoken; and yet the word which thrills and burns and oftentimes sets a world on fire is but the overflow of heart.

There is a great deal spoken and written nowadays about the broadening, uplifting, ennobling power of matrimony on a woman's life. Granted; but is a woman to lose all that if she does n't marry? Nay, marriage is not the touchstone of a woman's powers: love is, and will always be. Truly love, nobly live. Whatever woman may have been able to accomplish throughout the ages of the world in any sphere may be directly traced, next to the grace of God in the soul, to the love of a lifetime.

But to return to our quaint spinster. One of Miss Prissie's innocent, spare-time diversions was acrostic-making. To this pastime she was somewhat

devoted. The names of her pupils furnished subject matter for merry jingles which found their way into dog-eared Spelling-books and greasy Arithmetics. Most often these effusions were very poor poetical rhapsodies on her friends, but they were always accepted by said friends with evident gratification, remembering Miss Prissie's quaintness. Once, when the circumstances were unusually favorable for flights of genius, the Muse took possession of her faculties and pen, so that Miss Prissie really brought forth a creditable acrostic in blank verse on the name of Aubrey Graham.

On receiving it that young gentle-

man was so pleased that he wrote her a note of thanks on delicately tinted monogram paper, and sent up caramels every day for a week! Why did n't Miss Prissie rest on her laurels? Now was the very time, she thought, to press on.

She was so elated that she felt a desire to give holiday for a week in order to devote her whole time to writing acrostics. She was certain that she had found her forte at last! Had she been teaching a private school Miss Prissie would have voted a month's holiday to every merry-faced urchin under her care, pursuant to the development of her poetical powers. It was well for her purse

that she enjoyed restrained liberty in those days.

However, she continued to write with avidity as occasion served, but, at last, after many radiant fluctuations, she made a discovery which, if not equal to Benjamin Franklin's in point of world-wide utility, was, at least, more personally practical; that is, that the electricity of genius may be run in the ground!

Miss Prissie had poles set up in every direction, wires running hither and thither, and no end of currents. There is no computing the extent of supposable damage to the names in her vicinage had not the supply suddenly failed. She wrote a birthday


ode to the daughter of one of the most cultured gentlemen in the city, beginning:—

My dear little Rosie,
You are a sweet posy,

and ending quite simply with—

Good-bye, little Sissie,
Your friend, Miss Prissie


Comparing this with the wonderful effort in blank verse of previous days it was a sad and humiliating failure. Yet Miss Prissie, being of a hopeful temperament, did not despond altogether, but simply changed the base of operations. Her lucubrations took a psychological cast from that day on. From time to time she brought forth pensive productions



on "Memories" and "Hopes;" lugubrious ones on "Failures" and "Losses;" and even pugilistic ones, of varying degrees, on "Revenge" and "Presentments." Dear Miss Prissie! Not that the spirit of revenge ever found a resting-place in her kindly heart, but the genius which she possessed on a small scale was far too great to remain long compressed, and so it showed volcanic symptoms in some such overflow. Miss Prissie was not bad at all. She was quaintly good.


Regarding presentiments, Miss Prissie indulged in them about her pupils. Boys with blue veins across their noses would certainly come to an

early death, and girls with dreamy eyes and transparent skins she counted brief tenants of earth. It is a noteworthy fact that of all Miss Prissie's doomed children the blue-veined-nosed boys and the dreamy-eyed maidens are the most healthful specimens of young manhood and womanhood to be met with to-day. In this connection it is proper to mention that from her earliest years Miss Prissie evinced a *penchant*, if one may so express it, for funerals. She made a point of going to all. She said it made her feel less like clinging to earth, and that she believed there were more angels around at such times on their special ministries; and, therefore, she liked



to put herself where she could almost hear the rustling of their wings. It was a sweet fancy of Miss Prissie's and very quaint, — this funeral-going; but she did good, and the sight of her sympathetic, patient, regular face in the pew corner grew to be an inspiration to the officiating minister. But this is somewhat of a digression.

If the pen failed in its anodynous mission to Miss Prissie she was not discouraged in the least. "Music hath power to soothe." Miss Prissie loved music intensely, enthusiastically, almost, one might say, wildly, but she did not at all understand the harmony of sounds. Perhaps that was the secret of her unprejudiced love, — she



could enjoy without being critical. Miss Prissie had taken music lessons when a girl, and learned to play three tunes, — Fisher's Hornpipe, Juanita, and Annie Laurie, — which were a great comfort to her in advancing years. Said fact ought to prove a wholesome inspiration to modern misses who hate to practise, and are choosing only present rewards. Miss Prissie's life pointed many morals and suggested many lessons to the thoughtless, but she never lectured young folks. She simply played her tunes and sung her songs as the world passed on.


Miss Jane was deaf and Miss Martha too busy to listen, so Miss

Prissie's evening solos were quite harmless.

Suddenly, like the rushing of an Alpine avalanche, Miss Prissie's quiet evening songs were broken in upon.

The little lady received a shock, and several days elapsed before she could frame her mouth to the utterance of monosyllables, much less to the melting strains of Annie Laurie.

Miss Martha had taken a boarder, and a gentleman boarder at that! Poor Miss Prissie! Men made her very, very uncomfortable even at a distance, and oh! how sorry she was about this boarder!




CHAPTER III.

MISS MARTHA'S BOARDER.

The beginning of an acquaintance, whether with persons or things, is to get a definite outline for our ignorance.


GEORGE ELIOT.

THIS boarder of Miss Martha's was a fine-looking, portly gentleman of, perhaps, sixty years, who wore a costly beaver hat over his iron-gray locks, and covered his fat hands (which carried a gold-headed cane) with kid gloves. Mr. Archibald Townsend hailed from England, and in appearance he was truly "a fine old English gentleman all of ye olden tyme."




Miss Jane being, as has been said, deaf, and Miss Prissie embarrassed, he naturally addressed his remarks to Miss Martha. From her Miss Prissie learned that Mr. Townsend was in this country in the interests of his law business, that his stay in this city might be indefinitely prolonged, that his home in London was adjacent to Kensington Gardens, that he rode in Piccadilly every day, that he liked apple fritters and was not averse to mince-pies in season; and that, above all, he was the easiest of persons to please.

That Miss Prissie gave a horrified little jump when Mr. Townsend took his first spoonful of soup cannot be



denied when it is taken into consideration that startling things affected Miss Prissie's nerves. The act of taking soup, *per se*, is not nerve-provoking, but when four upper teeth seem to be dropping into the soup plate it generates a creeping sensation of disgust, not appetizing to say the least of it.

Mr. Townsend did n't have false teeth — more's the pity — but his possessions in that line were far less reliable, and often produced a startling effect on beholders. Miss Prissie, who had spent the greater part of life in getting used to things, soon became accustomed to this dental infirmity, and enjoyed his intellect. Here




was a man who had a marvellous memory. He would roll out selections from the "Night Thoughts" in a pleasing monotone which transfixed Miss Prissie, and pages from the "Essay on Man" which held her spell-bound.

He was fond of asking all manner of literary puzzles such as : " Who said, ' He who never thinks never can be wise ' ? Is ' Cleanliness is next to godliness ' in the Bible ? Who wrote : ' Procrastination is the thief of time ? ' " and so on *ad infinitum*.


Mr. Townsend was an intelligent, well-read gentleman, but he was possessed of an inquisitiveness regarding others for which his personal egotism was by no means a balance-wheel,

and which might have proved unbearable had the interrogated been other than three amiable spinsters. His mind seemed to turn specially to genealogical questions. In response Miss Jane was voluble, Miss Martha garrulous, and Miss Prissie modest. However, this gentleman was by nothing daunted. Every evening he would pursue his investigations until Miss Prissie had proved beyond a peradventure of a doubt that she was Priscilla Trippings, grand-daughter in the ninth degree of a certain Count Trippings, of England, who owned lordly estates, gave "livings," and wellnigh ruled — shire in days gone by. Further than this, the said Count Trip-




pings dated his ancestry far back to the times preceding the Norman Conquest, when the family name across the Channel was Trepanne. He likewise heard many legends of the prowess of the family knights in the days of old French chivalry, not to mention the later glory of the Crusades.

All this and much more Mr. Townsend drew from Miss Prissie in jerky phrases, spasmodic affirmatives, helpless efforts to make the run of a sentence without floundering; and final refusal to make another vocal sound through sheer fright. All such excess of girlish weakness grown morbid was received by Mr. Townsend with placid equanimity. In passing, be it said



that there is nothing more aggravating to a flustered spinster than a calm man. Excitement always winces under the superiority of repose ; and so Miss Prissie, under the spur of self-disgust, would regain her self-command, and by the time Mr. Townsend had gleaned another fact from Miss Martha would be ready for that gentleman's renewed attacks.

Why Miss Prissie went through all this painful experience simply for the sake of gratifying an apparent whim of Mr. Townsend's would be inconceivable but for the fact that Miss Prissie was quaint. The quaintest thing about this quaint spinster was the fact that it had never seemed to



dawn upon her that she might make things easier for herself if she chose. Not she, dear heart! She had spent her life in trying to make things easy for other people, but that there might be a reversed position, or even an inclined plane in her direction, had not entered into her dreams. At last came the end of the gentleman-boarder episode, and with it a most astonishing sequel as regarded Miss Prissie.

Mr. Townsend announced at the dinner-table one day that, having transacted the business which brought him to America, he should leave the next day for England. The sisters received the announcement with expressions of mild sorrow, and even

Miss Prissie managed to say quite audibly: "I'm sorry — very."

After dinner that little lady received a summons to meet Mr. Townsend alone in the library. She went wonderingly below. Mr. Townsend was seated in state behind the desk, and by his side was the most eminent lawyer of the city, whom Miss Prissie instantly recognized as the father of the maiden so recklessly eulogized with her decaying poetical talent. These gentlemen were evidently bent on solemn business, so Miss Prissie stood firmly and calmly awaiting their verdict. She was always strong to meet the terrible in life, was this quaint spinster, but

little things tortured and bewildered her like so many gnats or mosquitoes.

What was the bearing of these two lawyers on her life? Miss Prissie ran meekly over the record while the gentlemen scanned their red-tape documents. Her conclusions were that Mrs. Brent was bringing suit against her for the injury so innocently perpetrated against Tommy's shins.

"Please be seated, madame," were the words which broke in upon this quaint reverie.


The lawyers then proceeded in due form to assure Miss Priscilla Trippings of her legal heirship to large estates in England.

We will not dwell upon Miss Prie-



sie's first experiences of dazed happiness, which were closely followed by Mr. Townsend's benignant departure; nor upon the unfeigned delight of Miss Martha and Miss Jane, with Nancy's ejaculations of wonder thrown in; nor upon the interested surprise of Aubrey and the other "kin;" nor even upon the open-eyed wonder of the world at large; but will proceed to inquire what Miss Prissie did with her fortune.


One day in early spring Aubrey Graham dashed frantically into the family sitting-room exclaiming: "Well, of all quaint people Cousin Prissie takes the lead. She has bought all the houses on her block, and has be-



gun the work of tearing down; she is going to put up a grand building, keeping the Selwig sisters' dove-cote as a nucleus for the new. Is n't that quaint?"

But without waiting for a reply from the astonished family he went on rapidly: "Might as well try to combine silk and linsey-woolsey. I tried to talk her out of it, but it was of no use. She said quite simply: 'I thank you, Aubrey, but Miss Jane and Miss Martha could not be happy outside of the old home.'"

"Mercy!" almost shrieked Mrs. Graham. "Now that Priscilla is as rich as Croesus is she going to stick to those old fossils?"



"I thought she would be going to Europe," put in Aubrey's sister Camilla, "and I have been building large hopes on having her shoulder my charming self. I'd like to travel under the wing of my rich cousin. Some day, Aubrey, you will read in the New York Times of Miss Trippings and Miss Graham having been presented at court, etc. etc.;" saying which words she gaily snapped her fingers in the face of her handsome brother.

He received this air-castle with a roguish twinkle of the eye, as he replied: "I fear, my sister, that you will never be willing to pay the price of getting under the wing of quaint Cousin Prissie."

"Why, what on earth does she charge?" asked Camilla, wondering much.

"Only this," responded provoking Aubrey, "that you shall be a worthy member of the honorable family of spinsters."

"You *don't mean it!*" again shrieked Mrs. Graham.

"Assuredly, yes," he replied. "She is getting the home ready for the sisterhood. I predict failure, because nine-tenths of the old maids of Christendom are inherently opposed to being known as such, and therefore, would never enter an institution of that character.

"Again, I predict that the minority



tenth who will dutifully hearken to Miss Trippings' call are going to be so selfish and disagreeable that they will tear all the hair out of each other's heads within two weeks, and that the amiable foundress herself will be bald at the expiration of the first month's venture. Cousin Priscilla, in my judgment, is certainly pinning her faith to the most unstable and unsatisfactory object in the wide universe, viz: a woman of uncertain age without the anchor of a husband."

Having thus delivered himself the youthful autocrat retired from the scene.

"Well! *well!* WELL!" ejaculated Mrs. Graham excitedly. "Priscilla, always

was quaint, and will never succeed — not even with money.”

“It will at least be pleasant amusement to watch the progress of the failure,” yawned Camilla, lazily.


CHAPTER IV.

MISS PRISSIE'S CENTRIPETER.


Some of the loveliest characters I have ever met have been what are sometimes called old maids.

DR. JNO. A. BROADUS.

IN a large, sunny room of the Home for Spinsters sat a fair-haired, blue-eyed, fragile-formed "spinster." So she called herself, of course, with that radiant smile which lighted her face and made it seem a dwelling for the sunshine. The world called her Miss Grace Lawrence, but she was known in the Home as Miss Prissie's centripeter, for it was soon, and readily, discovered that possessions in the



shape of centrifugal tendencies were painfully in that lady's way. Poor Miss Prissie ! In a simple sort of way she was beginning to realize the fact that she was carrying the heavy end of an undesirable and heavy cross, that cross being, — not the Home for Spinsters, but the spinster herself. Miss Prissie deplored all this weakness in herself far more than beholders were troubled by it. She was continually on the judgment seat calling herself to order by her own conscience. That she had too much of that latter possession some very wise and learned persons had been heard to say. However, she was by turns stern, denunciatory, severe. She was



self-afflictive, self-abusive, introspective. She was mournful, remorseful, apologetic.

Against her centrifugal tendencies Miss Prissie had beautiful mottoes and Bible texts arrayed, such as: "Be sober;" "Let your moderation be known unto all men."


Yet that afflicted lady used often sadly to affirm that the texts *always* came to rebuke her *after* she had flown from the centre of a perfect poise and lofty example.

How long this one-sided war of a quaint spinster with herself might have continued there is no telling had not the new arrival, sweet Grace Lawrence, changed the aspect of Miss

Prissie's world, and put her at peace with herself.


Miss Lawrence had every quality that Miss Priscilla lacked, and nothing that that lady possessed in superabundance. The pair dovetailed into each other's lives with most beautiful spinster precision, and Miss Prissie led a charmed existence henceforth. Her centripeter did not tell her not to fly off — she did not tell her anything about it — but simply kept her from flying, that was all.

Grace Lawrence had within her that delightful charm of self-poise which quietly controls the whirling, bubbling, erratic humanity that is continually letting its centre of gravity



fall without the base. She controlled Miss Prissie! And would you believe it? Miss Prissie liked it! The majority of spinsters do not like it, and that is the reason why there are so many of them, forsooth. A woman must either rule or be ruled. The former means spinsterhood: the latter, wedlock. Dear Miss Prissie had always deprecated the need for the latter ruling device, but she *had* felt a something lacking in her life. This something Grace Lawrence, with all the noble and gentle characteristics of her unselfish nature, supplied.

On this particular day, as Grace sat in a low wicker rocking-chair by the sunny window, looking over some



books to carry to her mission class that evening, in came Miss Prissie flushed and excited. She carried in her hand a note written on tinted paper and highly perfumed.


“Read it, my dear, and tell me if it is all right. I rest so much on your quiet wisdom.”

Grace took the note, which was addressed to Miss Marchmont, and read as follows:—

MY DEAR YOUNG FRIEND:

[Miss Marchmont was fifty-five.]

It is with deep contrition I pen these lines. In my haste I spoke words which I realize now were unbecoming. I am sorry for them, and ask your forgiveness. You will do me the favor of not alluding



to the subject again, as to do so will greatly pain

Your true friend,

PRISCILLA TRIPPINGS.

The letter dropped from Grace's hand. "Well?" asked Miss Prissie.

"I think I would not send it," said Grace, simply.


"Not send it—not give it to her—not—not do anything with it?"

"Certainly," said Grace again. "Miss Marchmont knows you are her friend, and she is not seeking trifles to worry over. While it is true that 'little things make life' I do not think we should let life be made of littles. If a man is going to stand firmly on a rock island during a storm he must

be content to let a lot of sea-weed and shells slip from his fingers. So if you are going to accomplish the work you have set for yourself in this heterogeneous gathering of feminine humanity I think I should begin by dropping the insignificancies first. And, dear Miss Priscilla," she added, with a happy laugh, "I would not torture my conscience unduly if I were in your place."

"Would n't you? I'm so glad to hear you say it," and she gave a gasp of infinite relief. "I really thought I ought to do it, — a sort of duty, you know, to my spinsters, to keep them happy and contented."

How very, very quaint Miss



Prissie was! Grace did not say so, but in her deepest heart she thought it. However, there was the deepest sympathy between the two, and when Miss Prissie trotted away with the Marchmont apology under her arm it was with the firm resolve that she would never write another. And she never did!

Hereafter she lived by the day as Grace, by example, taught her to do. Done with the day she was done with the deed, and she was learning the blessedness afresh of living by those simple wonder-words of the Great Teacher: "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," — evil *past*, as well as evil future.

So all went well in the Spinster Home after the advent of sweet Grace Lawrence, whose calm serenity was to quaint Miss Prissie as restful and soothing as the voice of the waves at twilight.



CHAPTER V.

LITTLE MISS MEEKSON.

Sorrow can beautify only the heart —
Not the face — of a woman.

OWEN MEREDITH.


THE entrance of this little spinster into the Home caused quite a perceptible ripple over the surface of the stream of daily life. In the first place she was unhappy — clearly so — and yet nobody dared question or seem to be conscious of the fact that she was less happy than all the cheerful spinsters around her.

Miss Meekson was closeted with Miss Priscilla the major part of the

day of her arrival, but beyond that known fact there was no gratifying of spinster curiosity; for that a modicum of the same is in undisputed possession of said personages cannot be denied.


With no gratification of it, however, in Miss Meekson's case, this spinster weakness soon transformed itself into an amiable variety of interested pity, — a tame sort of innocent revenge on the poor creature for not voluntarily revealing her secrets.

One of the strict rules of this Home for Spinsters was that none of its inmates should propound idle questions to the others concerning either a bitter or a pleasing past. This rule was rigidly enforced.



However, to the credit of the Home and to the delight of Miss Priscilla be it said that not often was a culprit arraigned for undue questioning. The majority of Miss Prissie's spinsters were women who had suffered. Suffering hearts take no delight in causing suffering.

That Miss Meekson had dim, doleful, and pathetic secrets was evident; and it was likewise evident that Miss Prissie had them safely sheltered in the quiet enclosure of her own warm heart, whence they never emerged save, with Miss Meekson's permission, to sun themselves in Grace Lawrence's sympathetic presence. That done Miss Prissie felt better, and so did Miss Meekson.



Sarah Meekson was an odd-looking little woman. She was small of stature, but had a trim little figure which she was not averse to adorning in a becoming style. Her face was full of irregularities ; nothing was very good in the way of features and nothing very bad, and yet Miss Meekson had, by no means, a commonplace face.

There was something interestingly pathetic about it. The complexion was of chalky whiteness as if she had been raised on a diet of magnesia, and this white skin served to enhance one peculiarity seemingly native to Miss Meekson, — red-rimmed, highly colored eyelids. These, together with

short lashes, scant eyebrows, and conspicuous red gums, completed the picture of Miss Meekson.

From this ugly description — for it *is* ugly — one would be forced to conclude that Miss Meekson was decidedly homely, if not repulsive. She was nothing of the kind, but, on the contrary, had a face of unusual sweetness and attractiveness. At times, of course (in company with all orthodox spinsters), she had her ugly days, and it must be confessed that they were exceedingly dark, murky, and distressingly gloomy days for all unoffending beholders. The day preceding this flood-tide of uncomeliness had been, most likely, a time of tears

(the inflamed and aggravated red lids testified to that doleful fact), and a day when she failed to curl and crimp her straight and stringy hair.

But the one fact about Miss Meekson which transcended all others was her acknowledged popularity in the Home. All the spinsters loved her. There was n't a dissenting voice on that point. They had much innocent merriment at her expense, but perhaps they loved her all the more for that liberty-taking prerogative which they enjoyed.

Miss Meekson was an easy person to laugh at, because, in a quiet way, she enjoyed it, and, when convenient to do so, aided in the fun.

She had a peculiar way of drawing her mouth into what Miss Marchmont declared was "a prim, puritanical, church-going lip," because of the fact that Miss Meekson put it on every Saturday night and took it off on Monday morning.

Those Monday mornings! Surely a search into the records of the Spinsters' Home would reveal the secret of *why* Miss Meekson was so much loved there. She trotted around all day doing for each spinster the things perforce left undone. In other words she set the machinery of the Home on the right key for the whole week, and did things that nobody else thought of doing, — *little* things that

done were scarcely worth comment, that undone would have caused grat-
ing. Such was Miss Meekson !

That she was a happy spinster and happy as a spinster could not be claimed, but she was a grateful and contented one ; and that was better.

The one spinster, outside of Miss Prissie and Grace Lawrence, to whom Miss Meekson seemed the most drawn was Camilla Graham, — Aubrey's now spinster sister. Camilla had grown in beauty of character since her entrance into this home of contentment and helpfulness. She had learned the folly of a self-centred, pleasure-seeking existence, and was finding the needs of her higher nature wondrously met


in "the trivial task, the daily round." She "took" to Sarah Meekson at once, and the friendship was a mutual benefit.

Camilla in the outside world found many *protégés* to be clothed and comforted, and Sarah Meekson's gift of the needle — for it is a gift and one rarely so counted — stood her in good stead in all the charity campaigns.

What good times they had planning capes and mittens, dresses and hoods for the McMahon children to wear to Grace Lawrence's evening mission, or to Miss Marchmont's day class! There was no end to it all in the growing beauty of this work of developing untrained humanity in the

world around one. Miss Prissie recognized this, and in her happy plan for keeping spinsters bright and contented she gave them a work to which there is no end, and to *every woman her work*. Some of the spinsters fell into their special lines of service as easily as a tired child falls into a rocking-chair, but with others the path was more difficult, and required frequent promptings and suggestions from their ready and efficient leader.

It was plain to Miss Priscilla from the first day's conversation with the timid and tearful Miss Meekson that she would never be fitted for outside work. So it was really a blessing when aggressive, fearless, outspoken,



busy Camilla Graham laid an embargo upon the special talent of quiet little Miss Sarah Meekson.


It would be impossible to tell, in a short space, how many garments were made by this modern spinster Dorcas for the widows and orphans of the slums and alleys of the great, wicked city. Little Miss Meekson, fully realizing the blessedness for others in the gift which clung to the ends of her fingers, worked with all her might to see that the greatest results accrued. And they did! Ah! how many weary tired mothers rose up to call her "blessed" when they donned fresh robes, and went off to hear the preaching of the gospel

instead of lounging all day in wicked haunts!

How many glad children, faces beaming with smiles, rejoiced on their way to Sunday School in the bright prints she had made!

Such service brought its own reward to the little spinster. The pale cheeks were getting faint dashes of color in them, the eyes showed fewer signs of tears, and the merry laugh rang out oftener over the swiftly-flying needle. These changes delighted Miss Prissie beyond measure, for it was one of that lady's precious heart hobbies to have *happy* spinsters in her Home.

She claimed that spinsters, above



all people, ought to be happy. They had the God-given right to be. Did n't the Apostle Paul commend them? Was n't Lydia a spinster? Were not Martha and Mary spinsters? With such glowing and inspiring Bible examples Miss Prissie could not see any possible reason why all the women in the world were not spinsters, and certainly not why all the spinsters in her Home should not be *happy* spinsters.

Consequently this growing change in Miss Meekson delighted Miss Prissie's heart. She knew the sad, sad story which had rendered life so suddenly intolerable to her young friend; and to see her thus bravely laying

herself away day by day with one hand, and laying herself out hour by hour with the other for the good of humanity, gave good Miss Prissie's more experienced heart ecstatic little leaps of enviable joy.

To Miss Priscilla and her household nothing seemed wanting, and days sped on both love-winged and peace-winged for gentle Miss Meekson.



CHAPTER VI.

THE NEW MISS GILDERSLEEVE.

No more, but e'en a woman.

SHAKESPEARE.


THE cyclonic advent of Miss Maria Gildersleeve into the quiet precincts of the Spinsters' Home was an event of surpassing interest, as the effect of her presence there was of lasting duration. She came direct from London. That, in itself, was a noteworthy fact.

In the second place, she was an acquaintance of Mr. Townsend, — that important factor in the running plan of a home for spinsters, — and

brought letters of introduction from him to Miss Trippings. That lady, as nervous and flustered as if she did not receive weekly documents from said gentleman, put on her glasses, read the letters, and welcomed the new comer.

What to do with this new Miss Gildersleeve and what Miss Gildersleeve would do with herself were the questions which Miss Prissie carried with a puzzled expression of countenance to her exhaustless centripeter — Grace Lawrence.

This matter she need not have troubled herself about, for it was soon apparent to Miss Priscilla and to Miss Priscilla's galaxy of maiden ladies as



well, that Miss Maria Gildersleeve knew what to do with herself.


She was the learned type of spinster, revelling in the classics and higher mathematics. After a superb fashion she was mythological, ethnological, physiological, psychological, metaphysical, and metonymical. She was historical and imposing; classical and inspiring; mathematical and invigorating.

It is safe to say that one half of Miss Trippings' nondescript household was afraid of Miss Gildersleeve. They ought not to have been, for Miss Gildersleeve was an interesting and stimulating woman; but that does not alter the fact of the fear.

It is astonishing, though, how many

people in the world will persist in being and doing what they ought not to be and do !

Miss Gildersleeve was no whit daunted by apparent listlessness on the part of her companions. That lady felt that she had found her mission at last in the world of spinsters, — that mission being to see that every fragment of precious time was mentally utilized. She would step majestically from parlor to library, from library to sewing-hall, in search of spinsters with unemployed minds. No one dared to object, and thus knowledge of the higher sort was continually being poured into these brain-receivers whether they would or not.



Miss Gildersleeve belonged to the epoch-making variety of humanity. It meant something to her to live, and she meant that her living should mean something to other people.

What is the good of an unread book, she argued, but for the reflex benefit to the author himself?

An omnivorous reader herself she could not understand why other spinsters were not made after her pattern. In fact she believed they were, and serenely fashioned her life in the Home after that belief. If little Miss Meekson fell asleep over "The Gospel of the Stars," or Miss Martha lost the clew in "A Miracle in Stone," they were pardoned, and Miss Gildersleeve went blandly on with her reading.

She read well, throwing heart, mind and soul into the subject-matter.

Her voice was rich, and capable of handling any variety of productions from the age of Chaucer to the present century. Few persons — that was the universal verdict in the Home — read poetry so well as Miss Gildersleeve. She was not an elocutionist, in the modern acceptation of that word, but she was an exceedingly charming reader of poetry.

Her special favorites (though she loved all *real* poets) were Mrs. Browning and Tennyson, and right mellifluous were her renditions of *Aurora Leigh* and *The Princess*. Spinsters who did not care for poetry at all grew to love the music of her voice,

and the peaceful rhythm of the lines.

The great charm about Miss Gildersleeve was the blissful unconsciousness she carried about with her daily. She lived an absorbed and charmed existence. She would go calling with Plutarch's "Lives" under her arm, and dreamily offer to pay her street-car fare by shaking hands with the conductor. "Sartor Resartus" was her companion for picnic and excursion festivities, where she was the happiest spinster of them all. Happy she was in spite of, not because of, picnics and sister devices for slaying, in Miss Gildersleeve's eyes, the best of friends — old Time.

But with her books along she made these "wasted" days ring with delightfomeness. She was fond of quoting Mrs. Browning on her pet hobby — she had many of them — books.

"Books are
Men of higher stature,
And the only men that speak
Aloud for future times to hear."

It is needless to say that with these prevailing characteristics Miss Gildersleeve worked a pleasing and gradual reform in the Spinsters' Home which was recognized by Miss Priscilla, and in due time reported with most thrilling emphasis by that lady.

Miss Gildersleeve stood aghast at Miss Priscilla's formidable announce-

ment: "an important disclosure," and heard her through with varied expressions on her face of fear and rejoicing. At the close of Miss Prissie's speech whose sublime peroration was as follows: "*I* feel, and we *all* feel — feel deeply — that you have placed this Home under transcendent obligations by your classic efforts in her behalf," Miss Gildersleeve dropped her gray head into her shapely hands and ran away to cry. Miss Gildersleeve was altogether a unique character, and those who came in contact with her generally found themselves immediately helped by the contact: if they did n't want to be and would n't be, why then they became at once

the most wearisome of people to Miss Gildersleeve. Of course she had to meet many such in her contact with life outside of the Home. Of these she was wont to say: "I usually get something from everybody that comes along, but some folks are so vapid they don't furnish me a peg to hang a thought on." And it was a fact — they did n't. This life in the Spinsters' Home became more and more a growing delight to Miss Gildersleeve.


When young she used often to say that she had no desire to marry, but she did want to escape the epithet, "Cross old maid."

"What would you like best to be?" was then asked; to which she replied


with girlish naïveté: "Oh! a glorified spinster, of course." And that, truly, was what she was.

She glorified her existence, and made it a breathing inspiration; she glorified humanity, and spent her life in uplifting it; she glorified God, and cared for His honor and glory beyond her chiefest good.

Yes, a noble woman was Miss Gildersleeve. Ripe for heaven and ready for it she seemed to be, but, as she used quaintly to remark, "I have not earned it yet." So she went on day by day instructing, enlightening, sharing her knowledge. One of her particular hobbies, and to which she had given years of patient study, was the



condition of women in heathen lands, and many were the thoughtful faces gathered about Miss Gildersleeve when she would warm with this theme. Sincere was the sympathy, earnest were the responses, and liberal were the donations of these spinster women living in peace and safety in America, when they came to dwell for a season, under the resistless spell of Miss Gildersleeve's eloquence. Miss Meekson, in particular, would seem so much moved by the condition of the poor little girl-widows of India that she would weep copiously at each pathetic recital of woes, so much so that Miss Gildersleeve was invariably forced to change her subject. She would take



for immediate reading *Our Country*, *The New Era*, and *Go-ology*. Ever ready Miss Gildersleeve!

This sketch would be imperfect without more special allusion to the personal appearance of this lady.

In figure she was of the willowy type, and carried her head on one side. Miss Gildersleeve had a lofty disregard for appearances when they seemed likely to supersede or interfere with higher things. Mind was pre-eminently above matter, and she did not choose that her brain should be encased in an uncomfortable head arrangement because Dame Fashion's iron finger pointed thereto. Not a bit of it! She got what was comfort-

able for her head and easy to put on, continuing the agreeable arrangement until the headgear wore out.

About her dresses there was something very queer indeed. They might just as well have been made for Miss Priscilla or Miss Marchmont. Nothing ever *fitted* Miss Gildersleeve. She was really above such follies as wasting time at a dressmaker's. As for buying new goods, she was rarely guilty of so foolish a thing. There were stacks of old garments ready-made and made over already in her possession, and in these it was her pleasure to be self-forgetingly arrayed. She never thought about her clothes, and it is safe to say that nobody in the Spin-

sters' Home ever did. Miss Gildersleeve's high ideal was always this: the lower subservient to the higher, and as far as was attainable she lived up to her ideal.

CHAPTER VII.

AUBREY GRAHAM'S RECONTATION.


Go, track her steps to stricken homes ;
Stand by the weary bed,
And hear the prayers that mix with groans,
For blessings on her head.

Repress thy silly, thoughtless sneer,
For gray-grown maids may be
As dear to Christ, and dear to man,
As those of Bethany.

ANON.

It is the hardest thing in the world to bear, — this thing of feeling that other folks were all wrong for a goodly number of years, and then suddenly waking up to find that I was all wrong myself.

Nobody *makes* me do this — I'd



stout it out if they tried to — but I must do it in simple justice. I did not know everything to be known when I sat in judgment on Cousin Priscilla's novel venture.

The sequel has proved that she was right beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Her great house in the heart of the city is just the thing for the work those noble women are doing. Yes, they are noble women, every one of them, I do believe, and they are doing a noble work too.

As for that fighting and scratching I predicted, I verily believe they have never once dreamed of such things. My imagination was more fruitful in that direction than spinster per-

formances. Cousin Priscilla was right about everything, and her Home just where it is, with her spinsters just where they are, is doing a work for this city which cannot be reckoned by statistics. Why, don't I feel the effect of the Spinsters' Home right here in my office day by day? Is n't John Dixon the best and most faithful clerk in the city, only because he attends Miss Grace Lawrence's night class for boys, and there learns how to live the next day?

Don't I feel the effect in my kitchen because my cook goes to Miss Marchmont's cooking-school twice a week and on Sundays studies her Bible under Cousin Priscilla herself?

Don't I feel safe about young Aubrey's morals when I meet Miss Gildersleeve walking in the public square with his nurse and himself, telling pretty stories about truthful boys based on George Washington's little hatchet?

Don't I rest really well as a tired lawyer every night because my house-girl has learned from good old Miss Martha how to make beds and ventilate sleeping apartments?

And don't I owe Cousin Priscilla a debt of gratitude for the sweetest sister on the face of the earth? Why, Camilla is a new creation. From a giddy, selfish, vain girl she has developed into a sensible, unselfish, noble woman.

I could scarcely believe the witness of my own eyes not long since.

I had a business engagement which called me into the lower end of the city down by the wharves, and who should I stumble upon at the door of a wretched tenement-house fast tumbling into ruins, but Camilla! She did not see me as I stood and watched her unobserved. She had hold of two boys, both flushed and excited. There had evidently been a slum fight, and these lads clearly belonged to Camilla's mission school class. My first impulse was to interfere, and bid her leave the miserable locality; but on second thoughts I concluded that Camilla was her own mistress, woman enough and



womanly enough to manage her own affairs. So there I stood and listened to her discourse to two with streaming eyes. It made me feel very humble, very pitiful of weak humanity — I, a lawyer, with burdensome cases on me now from this very slum — and I wondered, if *I* had been so placed, would I have been or done any better than they. Away with the boasted wisdom of our superior manhood, and let the women teach us how to live and how to love! I stole away. Camilla never knew of my presence, but her brother has been wiser and, he hopes, better since that day.

Well, that's the sort of work Cousin

Prissie's spinsters do, — a quiet, womanly, patient, hard toil for other people day by day. The world is their family, the needy are their neighbors, the sad and afflicted are their friends. All honor to them, I say, from the dear old quaint cousin at the head down to the dismal little creature I helped off the train last night, — all honor to them *all*.

The highest honor *I* can bestow is to wish my wife was one of them, — *if she was n't mine.*

CHAPTER VIII.

A SPINSTER CONCLAVE.

"What!" said Ulric, "man and woman fractions? If so, what is man without a woman?"

"An improper fraction," quickly replied Mrs. Hotoph.

"And what is a woman, madam, without a man?" returned the redoubtable Ulric.


"A proper fraction, sir, to be sure," retorted Mrs. H.

TRUTH IN ROMANCE.

It was a mild day in early October when all the spinsters, by special request, were summoned to meet Miss Trippings in the library. When they were seated Miss Prissie began in a trembling voice:—

"My dear sisters and friends, we


are called together this morning for a very important consultation—a very important consultation indeed—*very*. We are all here” (at this point she glanced nervously around the room), “all except—except—our dear little friend, Miss Meekson, who is—is—at present—otherwise engaged. I am really *feeling*—feeling very deeply this morning. I could not sleep last night for thinking of the new trouble—I mean—I mean—oh, dear! joy!—oh! no. I mean this new thing that has come to us. I really don’t know what to call it, nor how to view it. It is really very depressing,—*very*.” At this juncture Miss Prissie paused to wipe the drops of



dew from her forehead, for speech-making was harder work this morning than she had even dreamed it would be. Before Miss Prissie's equanimity could be restored Miss Marchmont asked eagerly: "But what is the trouble, Miss Trippings?"

"The main trouble, I fear," answered that lady, "is that I shall never be able to tell it, nor allow it — oh! but I can't help it — that is the worst of all. This thing is really upon us in so sudden and unexpected a manner that I am really — well, to say the least — yes, sadly unnerved.


"You see this thing never occurred before in a Home for Spinsters, and it is really most distressing, — oh! no,



I forgot, peculiarly *happy*, but sad to us, oh! yes, very sad. I do not see what we will do at all. She is one of the essential features of the Home. I lay awake last night considering the bare possibility of every one of us being like her, why — why the Home for Spinsters would be broken up. I've met to tell you in solemn conclave assembled that I hope the thing will never occur again in your case or Miss Meekson's — oh! no, I did not mean to say that. I'm very glad for her, I'm sure — *very*. My dear Grace, you will really have to make the startling announcement yourself — I have never been so unnerved."

Then Grace Lawrence told in her

simple, quiet fashion of how Miss Meekson had come to them two years ago with a great shadow on her life, — widowed in early womanhood before the nuptial vows had been sealed. She had received accounts of her lover having been lost at sea, and in the depths of her woe had found rest and work in the quiet of the Spinsters' Home. They all knew what a blessing her patient, unwearied fingers had been in the Home and city around them. Not one of the inmates of this Home for Spinsters who will not miss her sadly in the daily life, but what one of them would not rejoice to know that her lover was not really drowned ! For many weary, weary months he




had been without her, and now there was something of blissful rest in the thought that the separated pair, with their joy heightened by contrast, were at this moment revelling in each other's companionship in the front parlor!

This was news indeed, — the most gratifyingly startling and romantic that had ever entered spinster ears since the establishment of the Home.

The next matter was laid before the spinsters in Miss Prissie's jerky, and now thoroughly agitated voice.

"Do you think, my dear sisters," she began, "that we should — that it would be proper — becoming — to have a — a — *marriage* within the precincts of the Spinsters' Home?"



To Miss Prissie's surprise — and gratification, be it said, for she loved Miss Meekson tenderly — the vote was cast affirmatively, and Camilla Graham was appointed to make the announcement to the astounded, but blissful, couple in the front parlor that such was the will of the household concerning them.

Preparations were commenced with the day, for young Dr. Harvey was in no mood to brook delay, while one glance at the happy, blushing face of Miss Meekson told the same story. There was n't much to be done, after all, so far as the bride-elect was concerned, for the *trousseau*, so sadly laid away two years ago, was all ready.

The spinsters themselves had much to do in the way of mental and heart preparation for the occasion.

"Nobody should look well," was Miss Gildersleeve's comforting reflection, on beholding her antiquated wardrobe, "except the bride herself." Then she picked up Whittier's poems, and went to read *Maud Muller* aloud to a few weary and listless spinsters. Even Miss Jane was heard humming an old love tune, and Miss Martha was caught surreptitiously peeping at an old-time picture of a very young gentleman in a ruffled shirt front. Does woman ever grow old?

Miss Priscilla Trippings herself, during those days of irregularity preceding

marriage festivities, — she declared to herself that there was nothing else to do, — found it convenient to pore over the faded, blue-ribboned letters of the long ago. She was not conscious of it, — the dropping of tears on the loved handwriting; but she calmly restored the packet to its place, and went out into her world once more. Life was busy and so was Miss Prissie, busier than ever from that time on.


The sweet and tender nuptials of Miss Meekson and Doctor Harvey were duly celebrated amidst the happy tears and congratulations of the assembled spinsters, who sent the wedded pair on their way with showers of love and blessings.

When all was over and the spinsters gathered once more in the library, Miss Prissie said very meekly: "I think we ought to do something, — something very sweet and beautiful to honor our lost Miss Meekson."

"Oh! but she is n't dead, Miss Trippings, — only very happy," said one of the spinsters.

"Ah!" replied Miss Prissie, with a doleful little shake of the head, "ah! but she is dead to us, — quite dead. We must never forget that we have given her to a — a husband."

When Miss Priscilla Trippings gave vent to certain pronounced views in a certain tone of voice the spinsters all knew that argument was use-



less. In this case they set their brains at work to devise a suitable plan whereby to carry out Miss Prissie's ideas.

"Why not have a Memorial Hall dedicated to her memory, full of books and needles," said the ready Miss Gildersleeve. That was just the thing, and so the sad and mourning spinsters were comforted, and set about the work in earnest. It was really pathetic to see their varied performances.

A life-size portrait of Miss Meekson *as she was in spinster days* had been requested of that lady by Miss Prissie.

The spinsters thought this a great mistake on the part of their leader,

and tried to bring all the powers of her graceful centripeter to bear upon this clearly wrong idea.

"Miss Meekson *as a spinster*," said Miss Marchmont quite disgusted, "was certainly at her ugliest for looks, I imagine, judging by the really pretty bride she made. It's a shame for Miss Trippings to spoil our pretty room where we spend our evenings with the *picture* of an ugly spinster. It is bad enough to gaze perpetually upon the *real, essential, live essences* of the tribe. Do talk to her, Miss Lawrence."

And Miss Lawrence did !

But Miss Prissie was firm.

She believed it to be *right* to have



a Memorial Hall as a *memorial*. Personally she herself would prefer a *brighter* portrait, but to consent to so much of pure gratification would not be in keeping with the fitness of things. Sad Miss Meekson in reality necessitated a sad picture of that lady. Miss Prissie had been trying heroic treatment on herself full many a day, and it had never once occurred to her that in all the simple details of life there was always a way out.

The idea did not once dawn upon this quaint spinster that a full-length portrait of Miss Meekson — the enchanted bride-elect — was really a far more *suitable* memorial than the weary, sad, even if peaceful, spinster

could have been. This Grace most faithfully tried to show, but Miss Prissie's centrifugal powers had the ascendancy, and she had her way.

Many months passed, but in due time the mammoth box containing the Memorial Hall portrait arrived at the Spinster's Home.

It was carried into the said hall and deposited in designated place. The spinsters flocked in and gathered around to view the opening. When all the covers were off and Miss Meekson's portrait lay meekly awaiting its unveiling for the benefit of the waiting group, Miss Prissie started as if she had come into sudden contact with a galvanic battery.

“What was the matter?”

“Nothing, nothing,” as the renowned Mr. Pickwick said on a memorable occasion, “only, only a *gentleman*, ma’am.”

Sure enough, there was the portrait, full-length, elegant, well-executed, of *Doctor* and Mrs. Harvey in all the rich bloom of early wedded life!

The spinsters almost shouted with delight, and even Miss Prissie smiled with benignant satisfaction as she read aloud the following letter:

HAPPY VALE, March, 189-

MY DEAR MISS TRIPPINGS:

I have no other picture of myself from which to have taken, and I would not know how to separate myself from my husband if


I could. You would not have me try, I'm sure, and I am certain that his will ornament your hall dedicated to us far more than will mine. I'm sure we both appreciate your goodness far more than we are able to say.

We unite in best love to all you dear ones in the Home, and hope that you may ever be as happy as is

Your sincere friend,

SARAH MEEKSON HARVEY.

Miss Prissie dropped the letter, folded her hands meekly, gazed admiringly but lugubriously upon the portrait, and then said with proper quaintness: "Well, I suppose we *must* hang this portrait. It is very plain — *very* — that Miss Meek — oh! no, I



mean — oh! I mean Miss Har — oh!
dear, *no* — I mean Mrs. Meek —
bless me, no. Well then I mean *both*
— well they *both* intend that we shall
never forget that — that — a *spinster*
got *married*."



THE END.



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